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"To live is Christ; to die is gain."

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# A SERMON

IN MEMORY OF

THE REV. EDWARD RONDTHALER,

PROFESSOR IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE MORAVIAN CHURCH,  
AND LATE PASTOR OF THE MORAVIAN CONGREGATION  
IN PHILADELPHIA.

BY

E. A. DE SCHWEINITZ,

THE PRESENT PASTOR.

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PUBLISHED BY THE BOARD OF ELDERS.  
1855.



## Correspondence.

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REV. E. A. DE SCHWEINITZ,

DEAR BROTHER:—The Board of Elders, at their last meeting, passed a resolution requesting you to furnish them, for publication, with a copy of your sermon in memory of the Rev. Edward Rondthaler, our late Pastor. Your compliance with this request will be esteemed a great favour by the Board and by the congregation.

On behalf of the Board,

Yours truly,

P. A. CREGAR,

PHILADELPHIA, April 25th, 1855.

*Secretary.*

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MR. P. A. CREGAR,

*Sec. of the Board of Elders of the Moravian Church.*

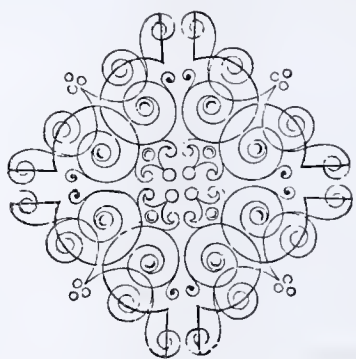
DEAR BROTHER:—Your note of the 25th inst., informing me that the Board, at their last meeting, passed a resolution requesting me to furnish them, for publication, with a copy of my discourse in memory of the late Rev. Edward Rondthaler, is before me.

I take pleasure in complying with this request, because I regard it as an additional tribute of respect to the memory of our departed brother and friend.

Truly yours,

ED. DE SCHWEINITZ.

PHILADELPHIA, April 26th, 1855.



## S E R M O N .

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THERE is, my brethren, something peculiarly sacred in the relation which exists between a congregation and him who ministers unto it. The hand of confidence grasps the hand of devotion; Christian love meets Christian love; prayers for wisdom, grace, and unction, are reciprocated by earnest supplications for an outpouring of the Spirit, and for an abundant prospering of the Word of God. “One is their Master, even Christ;” in Him, people, and the people’s teacher, all “are brethren.” Neither time nor distance can sever the bond of union. They who have been awakened, and comforted, and built up in their most holy faith, will always remember him who was the Lord’s instrument in so doing; will rejoice with him, if he, in another sphere of duty, can rejoice, and weep with him if he weepeth. And when, in the providence of God, such a servant finishes his earthly course, those who have but recently had him in their midst, and still hold in fresh remembrance the messages which he brought them from above, mourn for him, as though their friend had never left them, and meet to commemorate his Christian virtues, and his Christian zeal—as we do now.

But a little more than eighteen months ago, you, my brethren, were enjoying the ministry of a man universally beloved. That man is gone. You have lost a pastor who remembered you to the day of his death; I have lost a friend, at whose feet I once sat, as a scholar, to whom I owe much; and our church has given up one of the ablest and most zealous of her servants. We sorrow for him, and it is



right; but we do not sorrow “even as others which have no hope.” Convinced that the Lord of life and death is Christ our Saviour, the Chief Elder and Bishop of the Church, we know that when He calls a soldier of His from the “good fight” on earth to the Sabbath-rest in heaven, there is perfect wisdom in the call, even though we understand it not. Therefore, whilst bowing in submission to this decree, whereby our Zion has been deprived of one who was still in the prime of life, and whose services were, as we think, just at this time, very much needed—let us, you and I, gather in spirit around his new-made grave, and lay upon it a garland of remembrance, blooming with the fresh roses of Christian love.

I have chosen, for the text of my discourse, a sentiment uttered by the Apostle Paul, which appears to me to constitute the best and briefest description, both of the life and of the death of our departed brother, that could possibly be given. You will find it recorded in the Epistle to the Philippians, in the first chapter and twenty-first verse:

“FOR TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN.”

When Paul wrote these words, he was a prisoner at Rome; but the end of his confinement was drawing nigh. Soon would he be brought before that imperial tribunal to which he had appealed, and there would his fate be decided. Either a speedy release, and a happy return to his well beloved Philippians, awaited him, or a martyr’s death, and a martyr’s crown. Hence the entire epistle is full of deeply pathetic passages, which tell what manifold and conflicting emotions were throbbing within his heart. Now he speaks with certainty of coming again to Philippi, and is confident that he shall there “abide and continue;” anon he has a presentiment that he shall “be offered upon the sacrifice and service of the Philippians’ faith,” and see their face no more. And so he is “in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ,” and yet knowing that “to abide in the flesh is more needful for” them. But over all these doubts and anxieties,

there hovers that spirit of implicit confidence in the Lord's plans, and of earnest desire to glorify Him, whether by life or by death, which the text expresses. "For to me to live is Christ"—that is, if it be His will that I should remain upon earth, my life will continue to consist in serving Him, and Him alone; "and to die is gain"—that is, if it be His will that I should leave the conflict-ground, I will go unto Him, and be with Him, "which is far better."

Does it not seem, my brethren, as though we could hear our departed friend speaking of himself and of his earthly pilgrimage in this same spirit, nay, in these very same words? Who, throughout his entire service in the church, could better say than he—"For to me to live is Christ?" Who, during the last four years, could more fully realize the contending emotions of Paul's heart; long, to-day, more earnestly to continue his labours in the vineyard, and aspire, to-morrow, more fervently after that "rest which remaineth to the people of God?" And who, amidst the slow but sure progress of an insidious disease, could more fervently cry, and cry again—"And to die is gain?"

Therefore, in order that we may fully understand what we have lost, and what he has gained; and in order that the example of your former pastor, and of my former teacher, may incite you and me to be faithful unto Christ, as he was—let us at once proceed to apply the text to his life, and to his death. I will give you such details as I myself recollect, or as I have been able to gather from others.

I: The Rev. EDWARD RONDTHALER was the third son of the Rev. Emmanuel Rondthaler, Sen., whose long and faithful services in the church are held in deserving remembrance. He was born on the 6th day of September, in the year 1817, at York, in this State. When only two years of age, his parents removed to Nazareth; and there his career as student, as tutor, and as preacher began. Living in the town in which our Church School and Seminary are located, he not only en-



joyed, but also improved all the advantages which these institutions offer. At a very early age, he displayed talents of the highest order, and distinguished himself particularly by his proficiency in the ancient and modern languages. When I first became acquainted with him, he was a diligent student in the Theological Seminary, whom I would frequently meet on the school-grounds, hurrying, with rapid strides, from an hour's recreation amidst the beauties of nature, back to his desk and to his books. Soon after, he finished his theological course, and entered Nazareth Hall as a teacher. I was placed under his immediate charge, and for four years had every opportunity of admiring his talents, and of observing his zeal. Our relation, in time, became a still more intimate one, as he was appointed to prepare the class to which I belonged for an entrance into the junior department of the Seminary.

Most fervently do I rejoice that it was so ordered by the providence of God. What I, individually, owe to our departed brother, shall never be forgotten. It was not so much the amount of actual knowledge which he imparted, that has endeared him to my heart, as that irresistible enthusiasm for knowledge; and, above all, that fiery zeal for the Lord's service, which lived and burned in his very being. It was impossible to be near him, and not feel something of the same spirit arousing the mind, and stirring up the soul. In the midst of a Latin or mathematical recitation hour, he would suddenly drop the grammar, or the text-book, and, with a perfect stream of eloquence, tell of things relating to the ministry, to the preaching of the Word, and to the church. And although we may, on such occasions, have lost an hour's progress in the rudiments of a dead language, we had gained more than an hour's progress in the acquisition of a living zeal for Zion's peace, and Zion's prosperity.

About this time, Brother Rondthaler preached his first sermon. All who heard him, confessed that the Lord had granted him extraordinary powers, and most persuasive eloquence. Well do I remember the deep impression which one



of his first discourses made upon me. It was in the German language, on the text—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." It seems to me as if I could still hear him uttering the beautiful words of his introduction, in which he spoke of earthly crowns, and then suddenly held up this heavenly one to our view.

But I must no longer dwell upon these early recollections, for it would lead me too far. You, my brethren, will not only appreciate the feelings with which I have so fondly lingered around spots where I was a daily companion of the departed one; but you will also be convinced, that already had this chief feature of his Christian character appeared, which the text expresses. Although he taught the wisdom of earthly schools, yet, by his intercourse with those whom he instructed, he showed that "to him to live was Christ."

In the year 1839, when our class was ready to enter the junior department of the Seminary, Brother Rondthaler received an appointment as our Professor. The duties of this station would have been his delight; yet, as there were some conditions connected with the call which did not accord with his views, he declined accepting it, and remained in Nazareth Hall until the summer of the year 1841, when he was called to enter the field of active ministerial labour. After having been solemnly ordained a Deacon of the Moravian church, by Bishop Benade, of Bethlehem, he took charge of his first congregation, at Schoeneck, near Nazareth. Here he soon began to evidence, by all that he said and did, that the text words of Paul were his words too; here commenced that enthusiastic devotion to Christ's service; that bold, distinct, and often startling proclamation of Christ's incarnate person as the "pillar and the ground" of our most holy religion—which distinguished him until the end of his career.

In the year 1844, he was called from Schoeneck to Graceham, in the State of Maryland. His service on this second labour-field, was no less fruitful and blessed than on the first. He remained at Graceham for the space of four years; and

then, when his elder brother, Emmanuel, had sweetly fallen asleep in your midst, he came to minister unto this congregation.

What, my brethren, shall I say of this service? You know its details better than I do. That he was zealous and faithful in his calling; that the full power of his mental faculties, and the full burst of his heart's aspirations were devoted to the exalted work of winning souls for the Saviour; that he warned, exhorted, and comforted you; "Entreating"—to use apostolic words—"the elder as fathers, and the younger men as brethren, the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters;" that he often besought you, with strong cries and tears, to be "reconciled to God;" that, in spite of the symptoms of a fearful malady which soon appeared, he realized Paul's confession, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus," and did much more than his physical strength could bear: in short, that here too, and here pre-eminently, "to him to live was Christ"—all this is still fresh in your remembrance.

Let me, therefore, hasten to the remaining incidents of his life.

In the summer of the year 1853, Brother Rondthaler was called to preside over our Church School at Nazareth. He accepted the vocation, not only in the hope that a change of air and place would tend to the restoration of his health; but also, as he wrote to me, because he regarded the appointment as coming from the Lord. In that same letter, he added, in reference to his and to my new station, these touching words: "Let us trust to the Saviour's help, who will lead you and me in a plain path. I will pray for you, and earnestly; will you do the same for me?"

With characteristic ardour he entered upon the duties of his office, and again verified the sentiment of the text. One of the first regulations which he made, had for its object a more thorough religious instruction of the pupils. "To him



to live was Christ." The wisdom of the schools was good; but the "excellency of the knowledge of" the Saviour was better, for it maketh wise unto salvation. In a very short time, the institution over which he presided began to flourish, even more than ordinarily. This encouraged our departed brother to redouble his exertions for its good. But suddenly, when least he expected it, a dark cloud of wo settled upon his home. That devoted wife, who had so faithfully aided him in furthering the interests of the school, was snatched from his side, in the midst of her activity. Then he stood there a bruised reed, a stricken man. The Lord had not forsaken him, but the Lord had cast him down. From this time onward, his bodily strength failed rapidly. Still, even now, "to him to live was Christ." He could not be idle—he must do something for his Master's glory; and so, in the summer of last year, he accepted the professorship in the Theological Seminary, which was tendered him.

How wonderful are the leadings of the Lord! After thirteen years of labour in other spheres, that strong young man who had left this institution, secretly nurturing the hope that he might once be permitted to occupy the teacher's place, came back a weary invalid, with his hopes realized;—came back to teach what he delighted to teach, and then to die.

But here again, as long as he did live, "to him to live was Christ." With the enthusiasm of healthier days, he opened the store house of his mind, and brought the experience of his ministerial career to his aid, carefully endeavouring to prepare the young men in his charge for future usefulness in the Church. His disease increased upon him; but he continued to live for Christ, and to lecture of Christ, and to point to Christ. And when he became so weak that he could no more leave his couch, he called his students around it, and taught them from off his very dying bed. But soon this exertion too was greater than his failing strength could bear; yet, still that restless, fiery spirit would not quite relinquish the great theme of his entire life. And so he bade one of the young



men sit by him and write what he softly dictated, and then sent Him to the lecture room to read the dictation to the rest.

O faithfulness literally unto death! Who can regard that dying invalid, stretched upon his couch of suffering, and telling in broken whispers of the Lord and Christ whom he served, without magnifying the name of this Lord that He gave us such a man?

At length exhausted nature forbade him to do even this; and the weary labourer confessed that his earthly work was done. The last days of his life were days of great bodily pain. He spoke but little, and when the end was nigh, fell into a state of insensibility. On Monday evening last, at 7 o'clock, the Lord came to take his servant home. The hymns and prayers of the few friends who were at his bedside, accompanied the disenthralled spirit to the mansions of the Father's house. There was no struggle, no death's agony—"he fell asleep."

Such, my brethren, was the life of our friend. A short life—thirty-seven pilgrim years, and then the Canaan of rest; but a life which was not lived in vain. The Lord had chosen this His servant, and ordained him that he should go and bring forth fruit; and the brief sketch which I have just given, proves that this servant went and brought forth fruit, and a fruit that remains.

And now, if we look back upon our departed brother's entire career as teacher, as preacher, as pastor, as principal, and as teacher again, is it not indeed fully described and emphatically characterized by the words of the text: "For to me to live is Christ?" Brother Rondthaler was a learned man, an eloquent preacher, a successful pastor; but learning, eloquence and pastoral powers were to him nothing more than gifts conscientiously to be used for furthering the glory of the divine Master, who had granted them. Wherever he was, and to whomever he spake, he could say in the words of Paul, as he did say unto you, in the text both of his first and last sermon, "I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ

and Him crucified." And in this great theme of his life, there was especially one point which engaged all the faculties of his mind, and aroused all the aspirations of his soul, and that was "the mystery of the incarnation." His philosophic mind required "a reason of the hope that was in him." And when he began to examine the system of Christian faith, he was lost for a time, as he himself once told me, in a labyrinth of apparent contradictions, until he cast the anchor of his soul upon this rock: "God made manifest in the flesh." Then the darkness vanished, and a great light streamed into his soul. And hence the Incarnate God, "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," was his refuge and his tower of strength. From out this sure abode he constantly cried; "The Lord of heaven and earth, the Most High Creator left His throne to save the creature;" and with this argument he showed the awful nature of deliberate sin, and made evident the absolute necessity of sanctification, and laid bare the inconsistencies of those men, who, though professedly preachers of Christ, yet in fact assign unto Him but a secondary place in their creeds, scarcely uttering His name, except in the stereotyped close of their public prayers. You all remember that master sermon which he preached in your midst, entitled, "The Pillar and the Ground of the Truth," for which the apostle John lent him his own eagle's wings, so that he might soar up and look into the very essence of the Godhead; and I shall never forget a conversation which I once had with him, in the old parsonage, until late at night, when, with characteristic enthusiasm, he developed his favourite system in all its grand details.

Hence, in view of all these things, I can once more most confidently declare, what the text teaches—"For to him to live was Christ." And with equal confidence I now add, "but to die is gain."

II. Yes, my brethren, ours is the loss, as a congregation and as a church, but his is the gain. Had the Lord seen fit to grant our departed brother a full measure of health, and had He then stricken him down in the midst of it, we could,



indeed, bow in submission to the stroke; but we could not feel that gratitude which now mingles with our sorrow. For four long years has the fiery spirit of our friend been wrestling with its tenement of clay; for four long years, all the hopes and disappointments of an insidious disease distracted his burning mind. To feel his bodily powers wasting away, whilst the power of his intellect seemed to grow in intensity; to long for an unshackled activity, and yet, daily to experience that it was shackled by perishing flesh and blood—this already was a hard trial to bear. But this was not all. During the last year of his pilgrimage, the Lord, in His inscrutable providence, thought fit to come and sit over his devoted servant, “as a refiner and purifier of silver.” Not only did He take from him, in one and the same week, a beloved wife, and a revered mother; not only did He cause his “strength to dry up like a potsherd,” and make him long for death, when death came not; but He led him also through seasons of mental darkness, and bade him go into the hottest of faith’s conflicts. In the course of the last weeks, our departed brother, at times, was constrained to cry, with Peter: “Lord, save me, or I perish!” There came hours, in which clouds obscured the throne of grace; in which the anxious sufferer turned to those around him, with the sad complaint, that this promise of the Saviour, “He that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life,” was, in his case, not being fulfilled. This state of mind resulted, in part, from the peculiar nature of his disease; but it also evidently belonged to the Lord’s plan with, and leading of his soul. As such, our departed friend, in brighter hours, regarded it; and then, as I am told, he would often repeat the texts: “There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God;” and, “I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” Some days before his death, two of his fellow ministers stood by his bed. One of them said to him: “My brother, the conflict will soon be past.” He answered: “I am glad;” and then added, with that originality of ex-



pression, so peculiarly his own: "Forwards—forwards—upwards!"

He hath gone forwards and upwards, and is now in that "tabernacle of God," where tears are wiped away from all eyes, where there is "no more death, neither sorrow nor crying," nor doubts nor fears, "neither any more pain," and where "the former things are passed away." And because of his perfect freedom from pain, from weakness and from sin, therefore it is, that "to him to die was gain."

But his gain is greater yet. He to whom "to live was Christ," now is with Christ evermore. "Where I am, there shall my servant also be." Oh! with what rapture must the glorified spirit, loosed from the trammels of flesh and blood, have risen in that Monday evening hour, to the immediate presence of the Saviour. Who can adequately describe, who but conceive, the bliss ecstatic of the first perfect vision, the first seeing as He is of his Christ—his incarnate God? Who can think without a thrill of unutterable emotions, of those new studies, amidst the blaze of heaven's light, in which that thirsty mind at once engaged, looking into the unfolded mysteries of the Godhead, and finding everywhere that "God is love?" And when he came to join the goodly company of the redeemed, what a meeting must that have been! There was his immediate predecessor in this congregation, his own brother after the flesh; there were some of those to whom he had preached, whilst in your midst, by whose dying beds he had sat, whose departing spirits he had soothed with the consolations of God's word. And when that reunited company then together hastened to the Saviour's feet, to thank him, in new songs, for all the grace and the mercies enjoyed whilst in this church below,—Oh! an angel could tell their rapture, but no man. Therefore, my brethren, as "to him to live was Christ," so most verily, "to him to die was gain."

And now before we leave the fresh-made grave of your former pastor, and of my former teacher, around which we have been gathered; let us, I entreat you, solemnly renew our

covenant with his Saviour and with our Saviour, with his God and with our God. That covenant is,

To live to Christ and Christ alone,  
Till we surround His throne.

Fathers and mothers, young men and young women, and ye children in our midst; two of your former pastors, the immediate predecessors of him who now addresses you, have gone to give an account of their stewardship. Forget not the messages which they brought you; forget not their prayers and tears in your behalf, their besecching entreaties, in Christ's stead, that ye might, one and all, be reconciled unto God. Know that their interest in your eternal salvation is not at an end; for they now belong to that "great cloud of witnesses," of which the apostle speaks, and by which ye are compassed about. From the church in heaven, they are looking down upon your course in the church on earth, rejoicing at your onward progress, grieving when you stay behind. Arise, therefore, and laying aside every weight, and each easily besetting sin, "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith," until you stand with them before "the throne of God and of the Lamb." Amen.